

Child Welfare

Mission

To insure the safety, health, and well being of all children throughout Indiana through the development of family preservation services, child maltreatment prevention services, and investigation of child maltreatment allegations.

Summary of Activities

The Family and Social Services Administration administers a portion of the child protection program through the local offices of the Division of Family and Children in each county. Child protective services (CPS) family case managers at the local offices investigate abuse and neglect complaints that are received 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Through collaborative local decision-making, family case managers help determine how best to protect a child and how to provide the services needed to strengthen the child's family.



The focus of child protection has shifted in recent years to reflect an emphasis on prevention. Through identification of risk factors, local staff provides services to families in an effort to prevent or reduce instances of abuse or neglect. By consistently focusing on what is in the child's best interest, removing children from their home is often avoided in favor of family preservation or reunification. In those instances where a child must be separated from his or her parents for safety reasons, every effort is made to insure that a child is placed with a family member whenever possible.

A number of innovative and successful programs have been initiated in recent years to specifically target child abuse prevention. Some of the programs include Healthy Families Indiana, the Kid's First Trust Fund, and Project Safe Place.

In cases where a court determines that reunification is not in a child's best interest, a child may be faced with special needs – age, health challenges, member of a sibling group, or member of a minority group. The Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP) recruits prospective families for these children. This program also assists in placing such children with loving families who will provide a safe and secure environment for them.

In addition to the programs mentioned above, the child protection program also encompasses the local Step Ahead Councils and Youth Service Bureaus. Step Ahead is a collaborative process through which local decision-makers conduct long-range strategic planning to combat children's issues facing the local community. This often facilitates the identification of common areas of concern and the pooling of local resources to address these problems. The Youth Service Bureaus function as local outlets where youths can grow and develop through innovative educational, recreational, and civic programs.

External Factors

CPS family case managers are often associated with inaccurate stereotypes held by the public and media. The procedures that workers must observe in performing their duties are not widely known, at times leading to mistrust of the system. Through increased and high quality public information about CPS processes – but not specific cases – it is hoped that greater understanding can be achieved and that this understanding can lead to increased awareness and cooperation from the public.

The establishment of Healthy Families America in the early 1990s has been a positive presence that helped move forward the formation and success of Healthy Families Indiana (HFI). HFI is a home visitation program that provides families with services that promote healthy parent-child interaction, better family health, and enhanced child development.

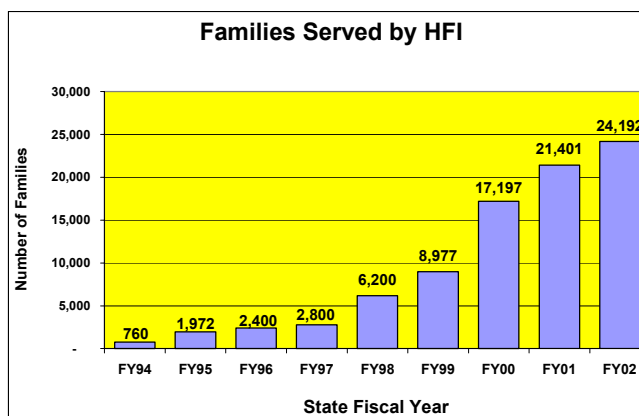
Evaluation and Accomplishments

The HFI program was launched here in 1994 and the number of families served by this program has continued to grow. In 1994 740 families were served. In 2002 15,282 families received assessments and were enrolled in Home Visitation. An additional 8,910 families received assessment and referral only. HFI has expanded to all 92 counties in the state and is considered a model program across the country. Healthy Families Indiana has been approved for national credentialing as one of two multi-site states (Indiana has 56 sites).

This type of dramatic increase in service has helped to achieve the goal of shifting the agency's emphasis from intervention to prevention of abuse and neglect.

FSSA and the local DFC offices have successfully implemented the Indiana Child Welfare Information System (ICWIS), a computer system that assists workers in assessing risk to children and provides statistical data in a number of key areas. ICWIS is one of the leading systems of its type in the nation, and its value to child protection efforts continues to increase.

Approximately 12,500 children and their families are being actively served at any given time. Indiana's adoption initiatives have resulted in an increase of finalized adoptions from 464 in 1996 (prior to state funding launching these initiatives) to 961 in 2002.



Plans for the Biennium

Healthy Families Indiana will continue to be a priority. Goals include screening 90% of births, offering services to 100% of at risk families, and ensuring that 99% of HFI participants have no substantiated abuse or neglect. The established goal of increasing earnings and savings of families by 15% will also decrease stress-related abuse and neglect. It will also increase the likelihood that the basic needs (food, shelter, clothing and supervision) of children are met.

A cross-system delegation (Governor's Office, State Budget Agency, DOE, DFC, DMHA, and Federation of Families) submitted an application to the Policy Academy of the Georgetown National TA Center to participate in a policy academy to further develop cross-system state policy. A Real Systems Change Grant (feasibility study and development grant for community-based alternatives for children) was submitted to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services in July 2003. If awarded, the grant will result in a plan to further reduce residential placement of children. A cross agency ad hoc committee has developed a plan to pilot routine, standardized behavioral health and addiction screening of children who become child welfare wards.

